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Parks and Recreation Minutes 01/29/2002

Robbins Farm Park: Master Plan Update Meeting No.1 Meeting Notes

Don Vitters (DV) began the meeting with an introduction of the CRJA Team and a brief overview of the master plan process to-date, including the significant contributions of the Friends of Robbins Farm Park in shaping the plan.

Carol Johnson (CRJ) stated that the CRJA scope of work is to review the current master plan and cost estimates, and offer suggestions to improve and update the master plan based on our discussions with the Commission and Friends. To begin this process, CRJ referenced a prepared agenda (attached) listing master plan elements that CRJA compiled to elicit comments and discussion from the Park Commission and the Friends, as well as to get a sense of the priority of each element for implementation.

The FORFP responded by stating that they did not agree with all of the elements represented in the 1999 master plan and welcomed the opportunity for further discussion.

New Playground

The Friends of Robbins Farm Park (FORFP or Friends) stated great interested in the 'community build' option for the renovation of the playground, because it would give the Friends and neighbors of the park a sense of ownership in the park. They want to understand, more specifically, what kind of contribution would be expected of them and how the process would work. They also wanted to understand who would be doing what, what the time commitment would be, and how the design of the playground would be developed.

Jill Ochs Zick (JOZ) offered that a both Landscape Structures, Inc. and Gametime, two certified play equipment companies, offer 'community design/build' programs and even go as far as to provide information on how to organize the effort. CRJ mentioned that some of the work would need to be completed by contractors. DV mentioned that the Arlington DPW had helped out with the 'community build' effort for the current playground and perhaps could be coordinated with to help out again.

CRJ confirmed that the playground renovation should be considered one of the top priorities. CRJ mentioned that CRJA would take a more in depth look at the options and process for 'community build' offered by the various companies, and that CRJA will make recommendations for a play equipment company that would support a 'community build' project.

CRJ went on to suggest that the play area could have a "Nathan Robbins' Farm theme". The FORFP liked this idea in concept, however, cautioned against too literal an application of the theme, suggesting that a "barn structure" could be erected, but that the placement of farm animals -- depending on the design -- in the playground may or may not be appropriate. The FORFP did mention that the car and house that are currently at the playground are popular and well loved by the children and that these should be replaced.

The FORFP suggested that the playground should serve multiple age groups and should be different from the Brackett School structures in design and in color. They would like to be able to look at equipment available from a variety of manufacturers. Other suggestions for the playground area included a merry-go-round, some combination of climbers and slides, a climbing wall or mound for children of an older age group, and more benches/picnic tables near the playground area. The FORFP also expressed a need to provide ample layout space for swing sets and to replace the toddler swings, as they are currently a safety concern.

DV suggested that the trees that are currently in and around the play area be considered and protected as any new structures are laid out, as the existing trees add to the overall quality and atmosphere of the play area. All agreed.

CRJ then inquired about the desire for fence around the playground. The FORFP clarified that they felt the fence should only be placed at the Eastern Avenue edge of the play area and not around the play space. CRJ agreed, stating that her initial impression of the master plan was that a fence along the entire edge of Eastern Avenue might appear too urbane for the character of RFP. However, the FORFP then expressed some concerns over the need to perhaps extend the fence to control stray soccer balls and to prevent unauthorized vehicles from entering the park. CRJ expressed that CRJA would need to consider all of these concerns in conjunction with the existing

conditions to determine how to best address keeping the stray balls in the park, keeping unauthorized cars out of the park, and admitting maintenance and emergency vehicles easily to the park when required. CRJ suggested a number of potential solutions such as earth berming, bollards, and various fencing types. Members of the Park Commission expressed a desire to have CRJA consider and recommend some type of barrier along the edge of Eastern Avenue to address these various concerns, as well as to funnel park users to the crosswalk at Eastern Avenue.

CRJ then asked about the hill slides. The FORFP felt that the two (2) hill slides that are currently within the park should be extended at the bottom end to slow sliding kids down. They also felt strongly that the underside of the slides should be made inaccessible to the kids, as the exposed structure under the slides is considered a safety hazard. The Friends also felt that the stairs and shrubs adjacent to the slides should be removed and replaced with a paved pathway to the top of the slide. This would provide a direct route to the top of the slides for the children, and would also address some of the erosion and visibility/safety concerns currently in the area. The Friends would also like the platforms at the top of the stairs to be addressed, as they are also considered to be unsafe.

The idea of a spray pool was rejected as an attractive nuisance. The Friends thought that a spray pool would be a great addition to the play area; however, they were concerned that it would attract too many users and cause traffic problems in the neighborhood. They also expressed a concern that the Town would not be able to keep up with the maintenance that the spray pool would require. They did, on the other hand, feel that a water fountain would be a welcomed amenity in the park. Again, concerns were expressed over the maintenance of a water fountain, as well as the potential for vandalism.

Finally, the Friends like the idea of having a sand box in the playground area. It was felt that the sand would have great play value and that the kids love playing in the sand that is currently at the park. Sand would not be used as the falling surface for the play structures, as this no longer meets code requirements.

Baseball/Soccer Field Renovations including Irrigation

The FORFP expressed a need to replace the backstop at the existing field, to rehabilitate the ball diamond, and to address the drainage problems within the field areas. This is considered a top priority along with the playground renovation. The Friends were not interested in adding any bleachers or other structures for the fields, as they felt that families could utilize the natural topography of the park to sit and watch the games. The Friends also mentioned a new pole that was installed at the fields to provide power and cable service to the area; this should be accommodated in the field renovation. CRJ mentioned that CRJA felt that irrigation would be necessary to support the field turf. All agreed. Members of the Park Commission expressed a desire to make portions of the fields handicapped accessible.

Pathways throughout the Park

The FORFP would like to greatly reduce the amount of pathways currently shown within the master plan, and limit the pathways to provide handicapped accessibility to the playground and to the area at the top of Boston Hill.

Boston Hill Area

The Friends do not want any large structures at the top of Boston Hill. They mentioned that some benches placed in this area would be great to admire the skyline view. They would like the addition of new “memorials” in this area stopped, and asked that the Park Commission find other ways to incorporate memorials into the park (i.e. donor trees, etc.) The FORFP also suggested the location of a stonewall and perhaps a sundial, as well as an interpretive sign or map to annotate the skyline view. There was some discussion around the excavation of the old Robbins’ House foundation as an interpretive element in this area.

Removal (and Replacement?) of Tennis Courts

The Friends would like the tennis courts completely removed from their current location. When asked about replacement and relocation they stated that the currently suggested location below the play area at the Eastern Avenue edge may not be the best place, as this area is heavily used for picnicking and may cause disturbance problems for immediately abutting neighbors.

The FORFP did request that the old tennis courts be replaced with a grass area.

Ice Skating Area

The FORFP like the idea of a skating area in the place of the old tennis courts; however, they wanted to understand better how this might be accomplished. The Friends stated that if it could be simply designed as a grass area with a drain in the middle, that it might be acceptable; however, there were concerns raised about maintenance requirements, as well as the skating area being another potential ‘attractive nuisance’ that would disturb neighboring abutters.

Additional Trees and Shrubs

All agreed that more trees would be welcomed, where appropriate.

Additional Furnishings

Fencing: CRJA will need to further examine the need for fencing all along Eastern Avenue.

Picnic tables: The FORFP would like a few more picnic tables, but not too many more.

Benches: The Friends would like more benches in the area of the playground.

Community bulletin board: The FORFP would like to keep this in the new design.

Interpretation of Park's History

The FORFP agree that the park history should be incorporated into the design of the park, where appropriate. More discussion on how this should be done is needed in future meetings.

Safety

Sledding: The FORFP would like to see the bottom of 'suicide hill' in the eastern corner of the addressed and regraded to slow sledders down at the bottom of the hill.

Barriers at streets: CRJA needs to study options along the park edge at Eastern Avenue to determine what types of barriers are needed and necessary to keep stray balls in the park, keep unauthorized cars out of the park, and allow emergency and maintenance vehicles access, as necessary.

Access points: No new access points to the park are necessary or desired.

Park lighting: The FORFP do not want any park lighting.

Sustainability/Maintenance

Meadow grasses in steeply sloped areas: Both the FORFP and the Park Commission liked this idea.

Drainage and water runoff: The FORFP mentioned that the current storm drainage system needs to be examined and updated to accommodate drainage within the ballfield and in other low areas within the park.

Low points/grading barriers: See "sledding" above.

Other

Basketball court: The FORFP expressed a desire to potentially relocate the basketball courts either to a new location within RFP or further into the park and farther away from the neighboring houses. They also expressed a desired to have some type of noise buffer between the courts and the houses if the courts remain in the area, as some problems with use at night have occurred. Some suggestions were made to perhaps remove the basketball posts and nets; however, this was rejected as the courts are popular with teenage groups, and provide that age group with a park activity. Others mentioned that the courts may be redundant with the new courts at the Brackett School, however, more discussion revealed a desire to retain this facility within RFP, as it provides both a teenage group use, as well as a paved surface for smaller children to ride bicycles. A suggestion was made to add a color coat to the current court surface.

Next Meeting: Proposed for 20 February 2002, time and location to be determined.

*See attached annotated plan for additional notes.

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